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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by SOS Éducation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

In third world countries, women constitute a vital link in the development process; however, they continue to be limited by their status as women.

In Africa — and in particular in Côte d'Ivoire — the struggles undertaken by human rights organizations and women's associations have helped to achieve progress with regard to respect for women's rights. While work remains to be done, there has been an overall improvement. Women perform administrative roles (directors, secretaries, nurses, prefects, sub-prefects, etc.) and occupy political positions (mayors, presidents, members of parliament, council members, etc.).

The Ivorian authorities have also passed laws that strengthen gender equality, encourage the recruitment of more women to public office, increase the minimum wage, prevent the enslavement and ill-treatment of women, combat early pregnancy in schools, prevent forced marriages, etc.

However, such efforts are insufficient, as scarcely 30 per cent of women occupy leadership positions in public administration and the political arena.

Furthermore, respect for women's rights is hindered significantly by traditional attitudes; in villages, illiteracy and traditional beliefs contribute to the lack of respect for those rights. Village dwellers are unaware of the importance of women's rights in their communities. That is why we are urging governments to focus on suppressing violations and raising awareness. Local authorities, members of parliament, mayors and human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should all play a part in ensuring a better understanding among parents of the importance and benefits of respecting women's rights.

Alongside such efforts, governments should combat poverty among women by funding income-generating activities. That would enable women to be independent of men, to feed themselves and their families and to fulfil their own needs without the help of men. Only then will they be able to enjoy the respect they deserve.

Lastly, we would like to express our thanks to the NGOs and to all those who work to restore women's dignity. Thank you.